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ABSTRACT

This study examined one public school system's change in its scheduling format from a seven-period day to block scheduling. This longer uninterrupted instructional time, usually lasting 90 minutes, provides for fewer classes and transitions per day, and the completion of more course credits during the school year. Participants were 200 high school students and 23 secondary teachers. Data were collected in two consecutive school years, using surveys which compared students' and teachers' perceptions on various issues related to block scheduling. All of the students were switching from a traditional seven-period format to a block schedule. The surveys consisted of 12 Likert-scaled questions focusing on attitudes and perceptions. Overall, students preferred block scheduling to the traditional seven-period day. Their perception when first introduced to block scheduling was low, but after 1 year of block scheduling, their interest increased. They believed it offered greater variety of teaching/learning methods, more meaningful use of class time, and adequate or more individual attention from teachers. Teachers also favored block scheduling overall, believing it was better for their students than the traditional seven-period day. Noted disadvantages included concern about learners' time between courses and less forgiveness of student absences. (SM)

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Modified Block Scheduling:
An Assessment of Teacher's and Student's Perception

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Modified Block Scheduling:
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Throughout the current decade, numerous high schools have been actively engaged in restructuring the school day. The need to increase student achievement level, and the need to provide students with more active learning opportunities in order to meet the mandated increases in graduation requirements have caused schools to examine different scheduling patterns (Smith & McNelis, 1995). The vehicle and key component being investigated is that of the variable time. The variable of time is a block of longer uninterrupted instruction usually lasting for 90 minutes.

Theoretically, block scheduling impacts the quality/focus of instruction and improves student achievement. This longer uninterrupted instructional time provides for fewer classes and transitions per day, and the completion of more course credits during the school year. Teachers prepare and conduct three courses instead of five or six courses daily, and are responsible for teaching and evaluating 75-80 students as opposed to 150 students each day. In addition, transitions between classes and lunch times are generally longer in the block schedule than in the traditional schedule (Edwards, 1993; Kruse & Kruse, 1995).

Block scheduling plays an active role in changing curriculum and instructional approaches as teachers adapt to sustain student interest and attention over longer periods of time. Improvements include the integration of various teaching methods, instructional flexibility, and creativity. The restructured schedule also asserts an improved school climate in which teachers

and students are more relaxed due to improved relations and a more moderately paced day (Day, 1995; Gerking, 1995; Jones, 1995).

Procedure and Participants

Southside Public Schools wanted to examine a change in their scheduling format. After calling schools which had made scheduling changes and examining a number for formats (alternate block, 4/4 block & modified 4/4), the faculty voted in favor of a modified 3-block with two traditional periods. This plan did not conflict with athletics, drill, band or choir. It also reduced the number of classes students/teachers are scheduled for at the same time.

The participants in the study were 200 high school students and twenty-three secondary teachers from the Southside Public School System. Data collected from surveys were used to compare student's and teacher's perceptions on various areas related to block scheduling. These students were all switching from a traditional seven period format to a block schedule. The surveys consisted of 12 Likert (1-strongly disagree to 5- strongly agree) scaled questions focusing on attitudes and perceptions. This study reports percentage and average Likert results.

Results and Discussion

Student's Perceptions	1997-98	1998-99
1. I like the block schedule	17%	45%
2. Classes are interesting, not boring	2%	36%
3. Teachers provide opportunities for students to work together	12%	45%
4. It is difficult to do makeup work	29%	9%
5. Discipline of students has improved	5%	9%
6. A variety of teaching/learning methods are used by teachers	4%	14%
7. I am getting better grades than last year	19%	14%
8. There is adequate time for homework	12%	41%

9. All of class time is used in a meaningful way	10%	23%
10. I am receiving more individual attention from teachers	5%	18%
11. There are fewer class disruptions	4%	14%
12. The block schedule should be continued	20%	41%

Overall students preferred block scheduling to the more traditional seven period schedule. Their perception when first introduced to block scheduling was low. When asked, I like block scheduling@only 17% strongly agreed that they did and only 2% thought classes would be interesting. After a year of taking classes in a block schedule format the students interest in classes increased to 36%. Students were initially concerned about making up work (29%), however after a year their concern decreased to 9%. Students initially felt that block scheduling would result in less variety of teaching/learning methods (4%), after one year (14%) felt that block scheduling offered greater variety of teaching/learning/methods. When asked, all class time will be used in a meaningful way@ initially 10% and after one year almost one/fourth (23%) of the students thought class time was used in a meaningful way. Originally students though they would get very little individual attention (5%), yet after a year the percentage increased to 18%. Today, students overall think (41%) that block scheduling should be continued.

Teacher's perceptions

1. From your vantage point, rate your personal like/dislike to block compared to seven period day.	(4.2)
2. Do you think you make optimum use of preparation time?	(3.9)
3. Do you make optimum use of instructional time?	(4.2)
4. Have you adopted new methodologies?	(3.7)

5. Are you planning your schedule to cover your entire course needs? (4.1)

6. Are you covering as much information in the same course in block as you covered in traditional 7-period day? (2.9)

7. Do you think club activities have interrupted the instructional day less in block scheduling? (3.5)

8. I have fewer absences and discipline problems with block scheduling. (3.7)

9. Students complete more assignments in the block than in the traditional 7 period scheme. (3.2)

10. I am able to spend more time with individual students. (3.7)

11. I am better able to keep up with individual students= progress. (3.6)

12. Weighing all aspects of block versus 7-period day, I think block is best for our students. (4.4)

13. I think block is best for school overall. (4.1)

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to compare student perceptions of the block schedule with the traditional seven period high school. It is clear from this study that these perceptions significantly favor the use of block scheduling.

A first and most important step is to confront the critical issues related to the success and purpose of block scheduling. These include the perception of differences on the issues of teaching methodologies, attention given to students, and implementation involvement. First, the variable time block will be a successful vehicle in improving the quality and focus of instruction. Secondly, increasing the individual attention given to students is a critical factor to the success of the block schedule. In this survey approximately 20% of the students agreed that they were

actually receiving more individual attention.

Cited advantages of block scheduling include more preparation/collaboration, more time with individual students, students and teachers have fewer students and more time with projects and labs. Disadvantages include concern about learners' time between courses, the schedule is less forgiving of students' absences, and concern with retention.

Finally, the administration should take a close look at implementation and evaluation policies. More involvement by students and community (parents) might prove beneficial in increased affirmation of block scheduling concepts and practices.

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